The curtain opens. Six twenty-year-old males, who are similar in their unremarkable appearance to each other, are sitting in a Kia Rondo. The car is facing left, ~80% of the length of the stage from the left side. It is night. Ivanovich is driving. Lysander is in the front passenger seat, looking out of the side window. Aschbrook, who is in the middle row of seats with Jefferson, is reading a book. Jefferson is fiddling with his thumbs. Baalsrud, along with Yaughst in the back seat, is staring at Yaughst, who is sleeping.

Ivanovich: I appear to have made a wrong turn.

Lysander: How could you make a wrong turn when you've been driving on a straight road for the last hour?

Ivanovich: I should have gone left at Main Street.

Jefferson: We passed Main Street over three hours ago.

Lysander: And I distinctly recall telling you to turn left at that time.

Ivanovich: Don't yell at me over it; I suffer from delayed reactions. Specifically, delayed hemolytic transfusion reactions.

Jefferson: I'm sorry. I had no idea.

Lysander: Just drive into that store's parking lot and turn around.

Jefferson sighs.

Jefferson: I guess we'll miss the party for the fourth consecutive year.

Ivanovich turns the wheel and looks around.

Ivanovich: I can't turn here. There isn't enough space.

Lysander: Try going into the back parking lot.

Ivanovich fumbles with the wheel for a short time.

Baalsrud: Oh, dear God! Stop the car! Stop the car!

Ivanovich stops the car. Yaughst wakes up. Everyone looks around. A sign is illuminated in front of the car.

Ivanovich: What is it?

Baalsrud: Don't you see the sign?

Ivanovich: Where? That one?

Baalsrud: Yes!

Ivanovich: It says "NO EXIT". What does that mean?

Yaughst: I presume that it's referring to the consummate abyss of the abject monotony of modern life in America.

Jefferson: No, it's just a traffic sign.

Ivanovich: How can you be so sure? There's no traffic other than us, so why would there be a sign needing to direct traffic?

Aschbrook: It was very likely posted by one of the employees in the store behind us who's seeking a second source of income by trapping drivers and selling them into slavery.

Ivanovich: But what if it really is a traffic sign?

Baalsrud: Then we would have to obey it. Otherwise, we would be breaking the law.

Ivanovich: I don't want to break anything. I didn't bring my tape.

Jefferson: We should be fine. I have a CD.

Ivanovich: But don't CDs break more easily than cassettes? After all, one scratch can render it completely inoperable.

Baalsrud: Breaking the law has the same effect on your driver's license.

Ivanovich: If it is a legitimate traffic sign, and we must obey it, then what should I do right now? I'm so confused.

Baalsrud: It clearly means that we're not permitted to exit this spot.

Ivanovich: If we can't exit this spot, then we'll be stuck here forever. Isn't there anything we can do?

Aschbrook: I'm afraid not. We must obey the law. Otherwise, we'll never get a chance to drive again.

Jefferson: There's not much hope for us in driving again anyway if we remain here.

Aschbrook: Yes there is. There's at least 20 feet worth of drivable space all around us. We can drive for hours every day for the rest of our lives.

Jefferson: Won't we need to refill our gas tank?

Aschbrook: The government would not post a sign which was intended to direct traffic smoothly if it would cause people to have their gas tank depleted before having the chance to reach a gas station. We will never run out of gas.

Jefferson: That is not my concern: Driving out of gas is.

Aschbrook: Well, we do not have enough space to drive anywhere, so the point is still valid.

Jefferson: I suppose you're right.

Lysander: How long do you think this sign has been here?

Aschbrook: We've only been here for a minute or so. For all that we know, it was placed moments before our arrival. We would possibly have to be observing this spot for quite some time before we would have the chance to see if the owners, public or private, returned to check up on things.

Lysander: We -have- been here for quite some time. At least a few hours.

Baalsrud: You are wrong: We have been here for at least a few days.

Jefferson: We could not have been here for any fewer than twenty-seven days, you mean.

Yaughst: It's not beyond the realm of possibility that we've been waiting here for our entire lives.

Aschbrook: Oh, the wasted years.

Ivanovich: The failed marriages.

Lysander: The sunken businesses.

Jefferson: But if we've been here for our entire lives, why are we just noticing this sign now?

Aschbrook: Someone must have placed it recently.

Lysander: Perhaps we should find this person and confront them over the matter.

They exit the car and walk to the left. An old man walks into view from the left of the stage.

Old man: Hello, sirs.

Lysander: Was it you who erected that traffic sign?

Old man: Which one?

Lysander: The stop sign.

Old man: Yes, it was I who placed that.

Jefferson: But what of the speed limit sign?

Old man: That is mine, too.

Baalsrud: And the "NO EXIT" sign?

Old man: I do not know whose that is- In fact, that is what is preventing me from placing any more signs on the premises.

Lysander: How long have you been stuck here?

Old man: I have been stuck here since I last was not stuck here.

Lysander: Did you see who placed the sign?

Old man: I did not, for I am blind. It was presumably the government, though.

Jefferson: You mean Uncle Sam himself?

Old man: I assume not, for he was trapped here just recently. Who would fall victim to their own sign?

Lysander: Uncle Sam is here?

Old man: Among others. Would you like to see?

The old man motions behind.

Lysander: I already can.

Jefferson: Don't mock him! You know that he's blind.

Old man: Only at my discretion. It is selective blindness.

Jefferson: I don't understand.

Old man: It is quite unclear, isn't it?

The old man begins bawling relentlessly as he walks backward to the left off of the stage.

Ivanovich: Now what do we do?

Baalsrud: I don't feel comfortable waiting near the old man. We should return to the car and wait for further direction from the government.

Lysander: Can't we just ignore it? No one would see us drive out of here.

Baalsrud: The old man might.

Lysander: But he's trapped here with us. He couldn't report our traffic violation because he has no access to a telephone.

Baalsrud: But what of the traffic cameras which are potentially strategically placed all around us?

Lysander: We would be gone, so they would have no traffic to record.

Jefferson: Good point.

Aschbrook: Let's compromise by just getting back to the car and waiting for a short while.

Ivanovich: We may as well. I don't want to risk losing my license.

They return to the car and enter in their former seating positions as the curtain closes. It opens again, denoting an elapse of time.

Ivanovich: I'm going to go outside for a smoke. Lysander, do you want to join me?

Lysander: I don't smoke.

Ivanovich: I am aware of that.

Lysander: I'm the only one here who doesn't smoke. Why would you ask specifically me?

Ivanovich: Because I regard you as my friend.

Lysander: Friends don't kill friends.

Ivanovich: I'm disappointed in you.

Lysander: Because I don't want to smoke?

Ivanovich: No, because you are willing to glibly stereotype an entire race of people.

Lysander: When did I do that?

Ivanovich: You said that friends don't kill friends. How can you say that when it is patently false? Just because most friends do not kill friends does not mean that they never do.

Lysander: But how does that make me a racist? Friends aren't a race of people.

Ivanovich: So now they aren't people, too? What do you think they are? Animals? You sicken me.

Lysander: Isn't it not a bad thing to establish positive stereotypes, though?

Aschbrook: I have to side with Ivanovich in this matter. Stereotypes, no matter how good the intention may be in their creation, always lead to prejudice.

Lysander: But it's a good prejudice in this case.

Ivanovich: I agree with Lysander: You're being awfully bigotted by presuming that all stereotypes are bad.

Aschbrook: Name one that is not.

Ivanovich: I'll give you three-

Aschbrook: [Interrupting] Five!

Ivanovich: Thirty-two!

Yaughst: Four thousand!

Jefferson: Twelve!

Ivanovich: I have to provide twelve examples of stereotypes that are not inimical? That's absurd.

Jefferson: Do you mean to tell me that you're prejudiced against Dodecornithorynchism?

Ivanovich: Wh- What's that?

Jefferson: It's the religion to which I subscribe. Are you bigoted against me over my reverence of the number twelve, among other things?

Ivanovich: I guess not.

Jefferson: If you do not guess, then what do you do?

Ivanovich: I play the piano sometimes, but I can't when there's a drought because the incessant humidity distorts the harmonics.

Jefferson: It's a good thing it's been snowing recently, then.

Ivanovich: Indeed.

Aschbrook: I used to play the piano when I was five years old. I was hailed all across Vienna as a child prodigy. I was not like the other children in kindergarten. While my precocious intellect led me to such ventures as negotiating the terms of the Kremlin Accords, the other toddlers were only concerned with drugs and alcohol. I remember one cold autumn morning in particular- I was trotting down a derelict path toward the playground, where I maintained an underground nuclear fission reactor, when a group of misguided ruffians approached me from behind the slide. I hastily drew my concealed pistol and dispatched my toddler-adversaries, after which I turned around to check on my reactor, but I failed to detect their getaway wagon's mounted machine gun. The subsequent driveby shooting, which killed over

three toddlers and wounded over four thousand others, paralyzed every finger on my left hand. The doctors told me I would never play a piano again. It took me until snack-time to finally acknowledge this lamentable juncture. I crawled to my mother and asked, "Mommy, just because I can't play piano anymore doesn't mean you don't love me, right?", and she grabbed my own belt and whipped me into submission for talking out of line: Every finger of my right hand was consequentially paralyzed. I plummeted into a declivity of sorrow which persists to this day.

No one takes notice of this monologue.

Jefferson: You still have not answered my question. Do you resent me because of my religion?

Ivanovich: I support you in your Dodecornithorhynchean quest for the truth.

Jefferson: Thank you.

Aschbrook: I am still waiting, too.

Ivanovich: You say that I must list twelve stereotypes which are not in any way harmful?

Aschbrook: Yes, and each one must be true.

Jefferson: I will take my shoes off to ensure that he enumerates exactly twelve.

Despite saying this, Jefferson does not remove anything.

Aschbrook: Good thinking.

Ivanovich: [Inhales] Here I go:

1:
2:
3: Strangers have the best candy.
4: The ice cream trucks which offer the best ice cream are white, unmarked vans.

Aschbrook: Those two count as one! And choose another topic. They're too similar.

4:
5:
6:
7:
8:
9: Babies are homicidal.
10: Iodine deficiency commonly leads to thyroid gland problems.
11: Telephones rarely have the letters 3 & 4.
12: Friends do not kill friends.

Aschbrook: Did he list all twelve?

Jefferson: I had forgotten how to count, but I remember now. Start over.

Aschbrook: There's no point: it sounded like a good amount and he has done well enough. I stand corrected over the matter.

Lysander: Even sit corrected?

Aschbrook: I sit corrected, too.

Ivanovich: But there are times when you are neither standing nor sitting.

Lysander: Yes, like jumping.

Ivanovich: Singing.

Lysander: Flying.

Ivanovich: Swimming.

Lysander: Running.

Ivanovich: Walking.

Aschbrook: Crawling.

Lysander: Falling.

Ivanovich: Limping.

Lysander: Crying.

Ivanovich: Bleeding.

Lysander: Dying.

Aschbrook: Yes to all: I am always corrected.

Jefferson: If you are always corrected, then doesn't that imply that you can never be wrong?

Aschbrook: That is correct: I am never wrong.

Jefferson: How many shoes am I wearing?

Aschbrook: Three.

Jefferson: I have but one. You're not correct.

Aschbrook: Perhaps not, but isn't truth ephemeral?

Jefferson: I agree. I'm still seeking it, myself.

Lysander: Even when you're standing?

Jefferson: Even when I'm standing.

Ivanovich: I'm stepping out now for that smoke. Baalsrud, do you want to join me?

Baalsruud: In marriage?

Ivanovich: Of course not! Why would you think of something so risible?

Baalsrud: Because I regard you as my friend.

Ivanovich: But friendship isn't enough for a marriage. [He quickly adds before anyone can accuse him of stereotyping] At least for me!

Baalsrud: I see. But why would you ask me, then?

Ivanovich: I did not. Why would you think I did?

Baalsrud: You plainly said, "Do you want to join me?". When someone says exclusively that, the first thing that comes to my mind is marriage.

Ivanovich: But I did not exclusively say that! Right before I said that I was going to go outside for that smoke.

Baalsrud: I apologize: I didn't hear that. I don't have very good hearing. In fact, I'm completely deaf. That's why I'm wearing this hearing-aid.

Ivanovich: You aren't wearing one.

Baalsrud: Yes, I am. It's in my pocket.

Ivanovich: Then the fact that you are not wearing one still stands. Sits, too.

Baalsrud: What you're saying is that because you cannot see it, it is reasonable to assume that I am not wearing it?

Ivanovich: Of course.

Baalsrud: That is preposterous. Let me ask this: Am I wearing socks?

Ivanovich: I assume so.

Baalsrud: But you cannot see them! Yet, you are impetuously capable of believing that I am wearing socks. It is only a diminutive step to acknowledging that I am wearing a hearing-aid. Even unsocked feet could take it.

Ivanovich: Socks are not meant to be seen. For a hearing-aid to be used, not being within sight- when you are not wearing a hat, that is- precludes its intended purpose.

Baalsrud: I am a free enough soul to not be subject to intended purposes. Did your parents intend for you to be stuck in this car with us? Of course not! But, because you were a buck-wild maverick, you walked up to them and said, "I am going to drive behind that store and remain below that "NO EXIT" sign. I'm going to be there during the good times-

Jefferson: [Interrupting] The happy times!

Lysander: The daytimes!

Jefferson: The nightimes!

Lysander: The sad times.

Jefferson: The suicidal times.

Lysander: The pedophilic times...

Yaughst: The time years ago when the car was inadvertently lit on fire by Ivanovich's discarded cigarette. I said, "There's still time, everyone! We need to get out!", but they couldn't hear me over the sound of the crying children who were visiting us on a field trip. I leapt out- What else could I have done? I wanted to

live- and- and the explosion which resulted when the flame reached the gas tank was eternally seared into my mind. I will never forget how Lysander was launched out of the window as his organs covered me in a torrent of blood. I thought he had been killed, but then he began squirming around and asked why he couldn't see, and why he couldn't feel his body, as he drowned in his own blood. And how Aschbrook latched onto my ankle with his severed hands as he was dragged across the asphalt leaving trails of blood while I tried to get away from it all...

Baalsrud: - and the bad times!"

Ivanovich: I suppose you're right. Do you want to go, then?

Baalsrud: I am not going with anyone who is unwilling to marry me.

Ivanovich: How about you, Aschbrook?

Aschbrook: How about me?

Ivanovich: You smoke, don't you?

Aschbrook: I smoke only socially: A bushel per week.

Ivanovich: Then you'd be happy to join me. Let's go.

Aschbrook: Don't project your compulsive personality onto me!

Ivanovich: Calm down! What are you talking about?

Aschbrook: Just because you would be happy to smoke after a moderate lapse of time doesn't mean that I would.

Ivanovich: Why wouldn't you?

Aschbrook: Because unlike you, I am indeed a buck-wild maverick. I'm the greatest non-comformist here.

Ivanovich: I can't picture you as the rebellious type.

Aschbrook: Did you know that I castrated myself at age fourteen to defy my parents?

Ivanovich: I didn't.

Aschbrook resumes reading his book.

Ivanovich: What about you, Jefferson?

Jefferson: I didn't, either.

Ivanovich: I mean, do you want to join me in smoking?

Jefferson: Okay.

They step outside.

Jefferson shoves Ivanovich a few feet across the stage.

Jefferson: Give me one hundred laps!

Ivanovich: Doesn't that seem like a bit much?

Jefferson: Maybe; I keep forgetting how to count. so I'm not really sure how many that is. Just run until you collapse.

Ivanovich begins running laps. He exits the stage to the right. Jefferson walks off following Ivanovich. The curtain closes and opens again. Time has elapsed.

Lysander: We should leave when Ivanovich finishes if no one shows up claiming to have placed the sign.

Baalsrud: No. We have not waited for long enough, and I'm unwilling to break the law.

Lysander: You wouldn't be charged with anything: It's Ivanovich's car and he would be driving it.

Baalsrud: What if I get charged as an accomplice? I cannot afford any perforations in my perfect record of civic virtue.

Lysander: This is not the problem that you're making it out to be.

Baalsrud: I'm glad that you're not driving the car. I bet that Ivanovich would want to wait longer, too.

Lysander: If he does, then I'll drive it myself.

Lysander reaches for the keys in the ignition.

Baalsrud: Don't move!

Baalsrud pulls a generic double-barreled shotgun with a 30+" barrel out of his pants and aims it at Lysander as well as he can in the cramped car. It has the wooden stock cut off to the grip and instead has an M4-type folding stock languidly attached with duct tape. Lysander's hand retreats.

Lysander: How did you manage to conceal that?

Baalsrud: Because it has this:

Baalsrud points to the folding stock.

Baalsrud: I'll shoot you if you touch those keys. As a precautionary measure, let's switch seats before they entice you to do anything rash and uncalled for.

Baalsrud, in the back seat, and Lysander, in the front seat, lumber as well as they can through the car to exchange seats.

Lysander: Why did you not tell us that you had a shotgun with you earlier?

Baalsrud: Because then it wouldn't have been concealed.

Lysander: Why did it need to be concealed?

Baalsrud: Because it was in my pants. Any other way would have been immodest.

Lysander: I'm not sure I understand.

Baalsrud: Allow me to explain. When I was four years old, I had a teddy bear. I loved that bear. I brought him with me everywhere I went, which was easy because I only ever went to one place: The local clothing store. We would try clothes on all day, every day. But one day, I lost him when I wasn't paying attention

during one of my frequent epileptic seizures. I never found him again. And so now, I carry this with me wherever I go, and it must remain concealed until times in which I intend on using it.

Lysander: I still don't understand. That seemed to be completely irrelevant, and it sort of makes me uncomfortable to associate with you.

Aschbrook: It's perfectly clear. You just need to develop adequate reading comprehension.

Lysander: But I'm not reading.

Aschbrook: That's the problem. A boy of your age should be capable of reading by now.

Lysander: I just thought of something: Do you conceal it even while you sleep?

Baalsrud: Yes.

Lysander: I call shenanigans!

Baalsrud: That hurts.

Lysander: You can't conceal a shotgun in your pants while you're sleeping. You need to be conscious and be making a deliberate effort.

Baalsrud: Then how do I manage to do it?

Yaughst: Perhaps he doesn't sleep.

Lysander: If he doesn't sleep, then what does he do at times when he would have been sleeping had he not needed to conceal his shotgun?

Aschbrook: He reads.

Yaughst: He trades stock options.

Aschbrook: He plays tennis.

Yaughst: He plays cello.

Aschbrook: He dances.

Yaughst: He develops a treatment for chronic sleepiness.

Aschbrook: He builds cottages for the homeless.

Yaughst: He cooks dinner.

Aschbrook: Lunch.

Yaughst: Breakfast.

Aschbrook: Breakfast? But what does he do during the time that he normally would have been cooking breakfast if he had not been doing it during the time in which he was supposed to be sleeping but is not because he can never sleep owing to his need to conceal a shotgun at all times until he intends on using it?

Yaughst: He sleeps at that time.

Aschbrook: Oh, of course.

Yaughst: So it's settled: You cannot conceal a shotgun while sleeping.

Aschbrook: It makes perfect sense.

Lysander: I'm not so sure, either way.

Aschbrook: What are you?

Lysander: Human.

Aschbrook: Are you sure?

Lysander: I'm pretty sure.

Aschbrook: So there is a degree of uncertainty?

Lysander: Sometimes, but I don't like to talk about it.

Aschbrook: That is my point: Certainty and its antonym are merely human feelings- emotions- in response to stimuli. Everyone knows that you must not let emotions obfuscate the objective truth of those stimuli.

Yaughst: Now I'm not so sure, too.

Lysander: I'm feeling awfully unstimulated right now.

Lysander looks out the window. Aschbrook resumes reading his book. Yaughst fiddles with his thumbs. Baalsrud suspiciously glances at the three. ~Five seconds elapse.

Everyone remains in their same positions. A four-foot-tall anthropomorphic duckbilled platypus waddles into view from the right of the stage. It is wearing a decrepit Chinese National Air Force uniform. It enters the car and sits next to Lysander. Only Yaughst takes notice of the visitor. Yaughst bitterly grimaces out of the window.

Yaughst: Oh, it's you.

???: Why so glum, old buddy?

Yaughst: I told them about you just a minute ago. They don't believe me. They mocked me.

???: Now, why would they do a thing like that?

Yaughst: I wish you could tell me! They called me insane. Lysander said I was a momma's boy. Baalsrud threw a brick at me. Aschbrook got me into a headlock and told me to say "uncle". I wish I never met you.

???: You mean to say that you renounce our friendship?

Yaughst: I mean to say that I want all of this to stop happening to me. I want people to like me.

???: I'll always like you.

Yaughst: I can't stay angry at you. I'm sorry.

???: Remember: Always keep your chin up. Even during rainy days.

The platypus begins exiting the car.

Yaughst: Wait! Can't you take me with you?

???: I'm sorry. Only you can find your path. Make me proud.

Yaughst: I'll try.

The platypus waddles across the stage and exits to the right.

Lysander: Hey, Aschbrook.

Aschbrook ignores him.

Lysander: Aschbrook!

Aschbrook: What is it?

Lysander: I'm getting nervous. We might never get out of here owing to Baalsrud's vigilance. Pull his hair while I secure the keys.

Baalsrud: I can hear you.

Aschbrook: I am unconcerned with both leaving and the alternative for the moment. I must find out what happens next in my book.

Lysander: What is it called?

Aschbrook: Suspense.

Lysander: Oh. What's the name of the book?

Aschbrook: The bible.

Lysander: I've never heard of it.

Aschbrook: It's an exciting tale about a private investigator, disguised as an ice cream salesman going undercover in an attempt to quell the illicit drug trade which ensues at the local amusement park.

Lysander: That sounds awfully suspenseful.

Aschbrook: Which is exactly why I can't help you out. Now leave me alone.

Aschbrook returns to his book.

Lysander: Hey, Yaughst.

Yaughst: What?

Lysander: We're never going to get out of here unless we retrieve the keys from Baalsrud.

Yaughst: How are we going to do that?

Lysander: It will be easy. I just need you to sneak up behind him and get him into a headlock while I cast magic missile.

Baalsrud: I can still hear you.

Yaughst: I'm not sure we should do that. He might shoot one of us.

Lysander: But I'm a level 5 wizard: I can cast three independent magic missiles simultaneously! He can't shoot us if I shoot both of us first.

Baalsrud: Stay in your seats.

Baalsrud raises his shotgun.

Yaughst: I guess that makes sense. Are you ready?

Lysander: Yes.

Baalsrud: I'm warning you!

Yaughst begins to raise out of his seat, leaning forward toward Baalsrud, who shoots him in the chest with one barrel of his double-barreled shotgun. Yaughst screams and flails around the car for ~ten secods before collapsing onto the floor. Lysander turns toward Aschbrook.

Lysander: He just shot Yaughst!

Aschbrook: Are you sure?

Lysander looks back down at Yaughst's corpse.

Lysander: I think so.

Aschbrook: How do you know?

Lysander: Well, I saw it happen.

Aschbrook: Hearsay. That doesn't sound like objective evidence to me. I must contend that there was no shooting until evidence arises which indicates that Baalsrud has shot anyone.

Lysander: We will have to leave this up to a majority vote, then.

Lysander looks out of his window and yells:

Lysander: Jefferson, get back in the car!

Jefferson jogs over to the car and gets into Yaughst's former seat.

Jefferson: What is it?

Lysander: Do you think that Baalsrud shot Yaughst?

Jefferson: Why not ask Yaughst yourself?

Lysander: Yaughst, have you just been shot?

There is no response.

Lysander: I think he's dead.

Aschbrook: Or perhaps he's sleeping. It is nighttime, afterall.

Lysander: That is a distinct possibility. But what about the liquid which pours forth so profusely from his mouth?

Aschbrook: That's his saliva. You see, people open their mouths while sleeping when their nasal passage has been sufficiently obstructed because their only other alternative method of breathing is through the mouth. Since their mouth is open, the saliva pours forth as such.

Lysander: That makes sense.

Jefferson: What do you think he's dreaming?

Aschbrook: Only he knows. Isn't it pitiable how ephemeral dreams are? He might not even remember what he is dreaming by the time he wakes up. If he doesn't remember, then he can't tell us, and we'll never find out. We'll forever be clueless as to the contents of his dreams.

Jefferson: Terrible.

Lysander: Awful.

Baalsrud: I'm pretty sure he isn't dreaming -anything-. I shot him.

Jefferson: You did? When?

Baalsrud: Just now.

Lysander: You shot a sleeping man? How could you?

Jefferson: And even worse, you shot a dreaming man.

Aschbrook: Now his dream of the little kitten trying to climb the ladder has been interrupted. He certainly will not remember it now.

Lysander: And he won't remember how he dreamt about the old man and the dog in the park right before his dream about the kitten.

Jefferson: And he won't even be able to remember in which order he had his dreams. Why would you do such a thing?

Baalsrud: He was plotting to kill me.

Jefferson: He was? How do you know?

Baalsrud: I heard him speaking about it with Lysander.

Jefferson: Hearsay. Perhaps you should ask Lysander if he was speaking to him about any intent to murder.

Baalsrud: Were you and Yaughst intending on murdering me?

Lysander: Both of us were fully intent upon murdering you. There is not any degree of uncertainty pertaining to that.

Baalsrud: See? It's unanimous. I shot him in self-defense.

Jefferson: It is not unanimous. I am still skeptical, and so is Aschbrook.

Aschbrook has said nothing to indicate this.

Jefferson: It is two-versus-two. We must ask Yaughst himself if he was planning on murdering you so that we can establish a majority rule on the subject.

Lysander: Yaughst, did you intend on killing Baalsrud?

There is no response.

Aschbrook: He seems to still be asleep.

Jefferson: What a heavy sleeper to sleep through being shot! The voting will be deferred until he awakens and tells us if he was intending on killing him.

Aschbrook: But, if he really is still asleep...

Lysander: Dreaming of the kitten.

Jefferson: And of the old man and the dog.

Aschbrook: ...We should be able to determine if it is possible to conceal a shotgun while sleeping.

Lysander: Good thinking!

Jefferson: What's this?

Aschbrook: Baalsrud contends that he normally carries that shotgun with him everywhere he goes while simultaneously concealing it. We cannot come to a consensus as to whether or not that is actually possible while he is sleeping.

Jefferson: Oh, I see it now. This is an interesting conundrum, isn't it? Baalsrud, present the shotgun to me so that we can verify your claim.

Baalsrud: No. If I don't have this shotgun, then I will no longer be carrying it everywhere I go. I have been doing so for the last twenty-three years!

Jefferson: Nonsense. You are in the car with us. You will not go anywhere during the time in which we are testing this.

Baalsrud: What if I go to sleep?

Jefferson: Then it serves you right for interrupting another man's dream while he was sleeping.

Baalsrud: I'm not going to give it to you.

Jefferson pulls a cupcake out of his pants. He wields it menacingly.

Jefferson: Hand it over.

Baalsrud: That's a cupcake.

Jefferson: Then killing you should be a piece of it.

Baalsrud fidgets.

Baalsrud: Are you serious?

Jefferson: Hand it over.

Baalsrud: I'm not going to.

Jefferson shanks Baalsrud with the cupcake.

Baalsrud: Argh!

Baalsrud drops his shotgun and dies.

Lysander: You just murdered Baalsrud! How could you do such a thing?

Jefferson: What have I done?...

Jefferson looks down at the cupcake.

Jefferson: My mind has been crumbling these last two weeks... Ever since I was given this cupcake.

Aschbrook: What are you talking about?

Jefferson: I've been homeless my entire life. Every day, I would romp around the city begging for bread from the more affluent citizens, until one day, when I encountered a strange old man. I said- I said, "Pardon me, sir. Can you spare some bread?". The man slowly reached into his cloak and pulled out this very cupcake.

Aschbrook and Lysander gasp. Jefferson looks back up.

Jefferson: I couldn't resist! Can you blame me?

Lysander: No!

Aschbrook: Of course not.

Jefferson: Ever since then, it has been slowly corrupting my thoughts. I've been losing everything: First my job, then my house, and now my mind.

Lysander: But I thought you said that you've homeless your entire life.

Jefferson: Don't rub it in!

Lysander: I'm sorry.

Jefferson: Now, I've murdered an innocent man. I have to stop myself before it's too late.

Aschbrook: You don't know what you're saying!

Lysander: Don't do it!

Jefferson eats the cupcake and dies.

Lysander: He was so brave.

Aschbrook: But it's over now. The war has ended, and the empire long divided has united.

Lysander: I can't believe I was almost drafted.

Aschbrook: Don't fear. I know what will cheer you up: Let's check to see if Yaughst can conceal a shotgun while sleeping.

Lysander: Good idea.

Aschbrook picks up the shotgun and places it into Yaughst's pants. It sticks out conspicuously.

Lysander: I knew it. Sleeping men can't conceal shotguns in their pants. Therefore, Baalsrud could not have possibly brought it with him, even though he said that he carried it everywhere he used to go.

Aschbrook: That shotgun is making me nervous. Now that the controversy has been settled, can you remove it from the car?

Lysander: Why?

Aschbrook: Baalsrud might be reanimated as a zombie. Considering we've established that he successfully carried his shotgun everywhere he used to go, we would be in danger. What if he goes postal?

Lysander: Good thinking.

Lysander picks up the shotgun, gets out of the car, and drops it below the "NO EXIT" sign. He returns to his seat.

Lysander: Wait- How would he manage to do that? We aren't near a post office.

Aschbrook: That may be true, but I work in one.

Lysander: You do? Amazing! I've known you for my entire life and I am just finding this out now?

Aschbrook: Today is my first day.

Lysander: But it's Sunday.

Aschbrook: What of it?

Lysander: The post office is closed on Sunday.

Aschbrook: I don't let inconsequential inconveniences influence my actions. Maybe if you were more like me, you wouldn't be unemployed. It's called ingenuity.

Lysander: But you were planning on partying with us all night. That would preclude you from working at the post office.

Aschbrook: And now I can't do either because I'm stuck here with you under this sign.

Aschbrook sighs.

Lysander: Maybe we can party here.

Aschbrook: But Jefferson ate the only cupcake. I can't party without adequate refreshments.

Lysander: He said that he was given the cupcake by an old man. And remember what Ivanovich said: Old

men have the best cupcakes.

Aschbrook: Perhaps a young man will have a regular cake. Older people have smaller appetites, so all they ever have are cupcakes.

Lysander: There aren't any young men here, though.

Aschbrook: Just as there aren't any old ones.

Lysander: Yes, there is one.

Aschbrook: Who?

Lysander: That schizophrenic vagabond we met earlier.

Aschbrook: He creeps me out.

Lysander and Aschbrook begin exiting the car.

Lysander: Then we'd better lock the doors in the event he tries to creep in.

Aschbrook: Good idea.

Lysander locks the doors takes the keys. The two begin walking to the left of the stage.

The old man steps out.

Old man: I've been waiting for you.

Lysander: How did you know that we were coming?

Old man: I didn't. I fortuitously was just waiting.

Lysander: Then it's lucky we arrived. Do you happen to have any cupcakes? It has been rumored that old men commonly distribute them.

Old man: Did you hear that from your friend Jefferson?

Lysander: How do you know his name?

Old man: Because it was I who gave the cupcake to him.

Lysander: Didn't you know that it would corrupt him? You should've known that he would be unable to handle that much unbridled power.

Old man: That is exactly what I sought when I gave it to him tonight.

Lysander: Why did you do such a thing? He murdered our friend Baalsrud because of it.

Old man: Then events transpired just as I had intended.

Lysander: Why did you want that to happen?

Old man: Because I am the former owner of the clothing store which Baalsrud regularly visited all those years ago. Every day, I would see Baalsrud and that acrimonious teddy bear enter my clothing store. He would take my inventory and rub that bear all over it, taking perfectly folded clothes and putting them on

that aberration. That was when I knew that something had to be done: I had to kill that child and his bear.

Lysander: Oh, my.

Old man: I've been plotting for millenia on how I should achieve this, but all in vain. I was behind the 1906 San Francisco earthquake; the Oklahoma City Bombing; the Gulf of Tonkin incident: Nothing could phase that child and his sardonic bear. One day when he was in the changing room while his bear was waiting outside, I grabbed him.

Lysander: Isn't that sexual harrassment?

Old man: That's what the teddy bear told me. I instructed him to keep quiet and not struggle or else he would never see his owner again, but that surreptitious bear did not comply: Despite being locked in my warehouse, he managed to escape one night into the darkness. I've been tracking him for the last fifteen years. I've lost everything in the process- And that was before I was trapped here by that infernal "NO EXIT" sign. As soon as I laid eyes upon it, I realized that I had no hope for the future. I was going to be stuck here forever. But I knew that one day- One day, that child and his teddy bear would get trapped here just as I had been so many years ago. And both of them are.

Lysander: Where is this teddy bear?

Lysander looks around the stage.

Old man: He's standing right in front of me.

Lysander turns toward Aschbrook.

Lysander: What's he talking about?

Aschbrook: No! It's not true!

Old man: It ends here. I'm going to rough you up!

The old man tackles Aschbrook. They fumble & tumble hither & thither up until they reach the car. Lysander follows behind them. When they reach the sign, Aschbrook trips backward over the shotgun and severs his neck on the "NO EXIT" sign. He picks up the shotgun and shoots the old man in the chest. Rather than flying backward as stereotypically portrayed in movies, the old man leaps forward, although having had no corresponding prior momentum to do so, and dies.

Aschbrook is sitting, leaning up against the car, holding his throat.

Lysander: Aschbrook!

Aschbrook: Don't worry about me. All of this has taught me something.

Lysander: What?

Aschbrook: I can't remember. My spurting carotid artery is distracting me.

Lysander: I know the feeling.

Aschbrook: But there is something I've realized throughout all of this: You were right. There's no point in obeying the sign. Start the car and get out of here. You still have a future.

Lysander: But you can come with me!

Aschbrook: I cannot, for I am dying.

Lysander: Excuses, excuses.

Lyander slaps Aschbrook. Aschbrook dies. Lysander wipes his eyes for ~five seconds, at which point Ivanovich returns from his laps. He looks down at all of the corpses as he slowly trods toward Lysander.

Ivanovich: What happened here?

Lysander: Anything that transpired here tonight is irrelevant.

Ivanovich: What are you saying?

Lysander: What all this has amounted to is that I've realized we should have just ignored the sign from the beginning. Let's start the car and get out of here.

Ivanovich smiles.

Ivanovich: That sounds good to me.

Lysander smiles. Dawn approaches.

Lysander: Here are the keys.

Lysander reaches into his pocket.

Ivanovich: Do you know what?

Lysander: If you're phrasing your question like that, then probably not.

Ivanovich: I am not going with you.

Lysander: Why not?

Ivanovich: Because I am the monk from Laos.

Lysander: I have no idea what you're talking about.

Ivanovich: Do you not remember?

Lysander: Remember what?

Ivanovich: Yaughst's soliloquy about how he became who he was owing to the teachings of Kaido the Elder, whom he met while he was in Laos with the Catholic missionaries.

Lysander: I still have no idea what you're talking about.

Ivanovich: Didn't Yaughst tell you about how he managed to reunite our community?

Lysander: I don't remember him saying anything about monks or communities. He died fairly quickly, so perhaps he never had the chance to say anything. I vaguely remember only something discursively having to do with an old man, Baalsrud, and some teddy bear in a clothing store. I thought the whole situation was pretty contrived and pathetic, really.

Ivanovich: I'm sorry. I'm still getting used to this. Deus ex machina is difficult to master. I don't even know if I was applying it correctly.

Lysander: I know the feeling.

Ivanovich: Now I don't know who I am. I've failed to establish a purpose for my identity. I- I have no purpose in life.

Ivanovich looks down at the shotgun.

Lysander: It's out of ammunition.

Ivanovich looks over to the "NO EXIT" sign.

Lysander: It's too dull.

Ivanovich sighs.

Lysander: Snap out of it!

Ivanovich: Wh- What?

Lysander: Nothing is going to be solved by another needless death. Just because you're unwieldly and have no resolute purpose for existing doesn't mean that you need to die.

Ivanovich: It doesn't?

Lysander: No, and maybe that's what Aschbrook learned, too. Why can't we have intrinsic value just by being ourselves- By being conduits for a story of people who are vastly greater than our inferior selves?

Ivanovich: You've done a lot of growing up tonight.

Lysander: Let's get in the car. I'll drive you back to your house.

Lysander and Ivanovich enter the car. The corpses roll off the stage. The car starts and Lysander begins driving. "NO EXIT" fades from visibility. A police sniper slides from the left side of the stage in a kneeling position and is illuminated as Lysander and Ivanovich gasp. The sniper shoots Ivanovich. Ivanovich dies. Red and blue lights flash out-of-view from the right of the stage behind the car as the police sniper vanishes.

Lysander: Gasp!

Over a loudspeaker:

Police: Pull over!

Lysander: I knew that I should have obeyed that traffic sign.

Lysander turns the steering wheel to the right as the curtain closes.

The curtain opens revealing a handcuffed Lysander sitting in an austere wooden chair facing a police officer who is sitting in an identical chair. A matching table separates them. Atop it rests a tape recorder.

Police: I see several glaring flaws in your story.

Lysander: Give one.

Police: The vehicle which you were driving was not a Kia Rondo but was instead a Honda Civic.

Lysander: Baalsrud always did value a perfect record of civic virtue.

Police: There could not have possibly been a police sniper. Our department does not train any: We do not even issue rifles to our patrol cars.

Lysander: Then this is clearly an instance of a rogue disgruntled police officer exhibiting police brutality. The scoundrel should be reprimanded.

Police: What was this alleged, uh- Platypus, you said it was?

Lysander: How should I know? Yaughst always was quite delusional.

Police: If the apparation was someone else's delusion, then how did you see it?

Lysander: I am an attentive person. Perhaps you would also begin to notice things if you tried at all, philistine.

Police: Most prominent is the fact that I've reviewed the footage from the camera which we have strategically situated atop that sign. At 10:13 you entered the back parking lot. Ivan Ivanovich's corpse was seated in the passenger seat with a bullet wound in his chest. You were the only two people in the video at any time. You immediately exited the vehicle, appeared to have recited a riverdance-limbo hybrid, returned to the vehicle, and drive out of the parking lot at 10:17. Where were the numerous people you listed in your retrospection?

Lysander: Perhaps they were at the party. I never did make it to there. I hope they're having a good time.

Police: How do you explain Mr. Ivanovich's corpse being present before the alleged murder?

Lysander: Clearly, police brutality has become so pervasive that it transcends the boundaries of time. Perhaps you should evaluate the ethics of your department before you partake in further traffic stops.

Police: Your story is difficult to believe.

Lysander: Are you calling me a liar?

Police: No, it seems to be too intricate to have been improvised and too illogical to have been delineated from a pre-fabricated source. I'm concerned by what you've told me. Your, uh, riverdance also seems to be a red flag of some sort. I have to take a short break for a moment, and when I come back, someone else is going to be joining me. His name is Dr. Meyer. I would like you to speak with him about a few things.

The curtain closes.